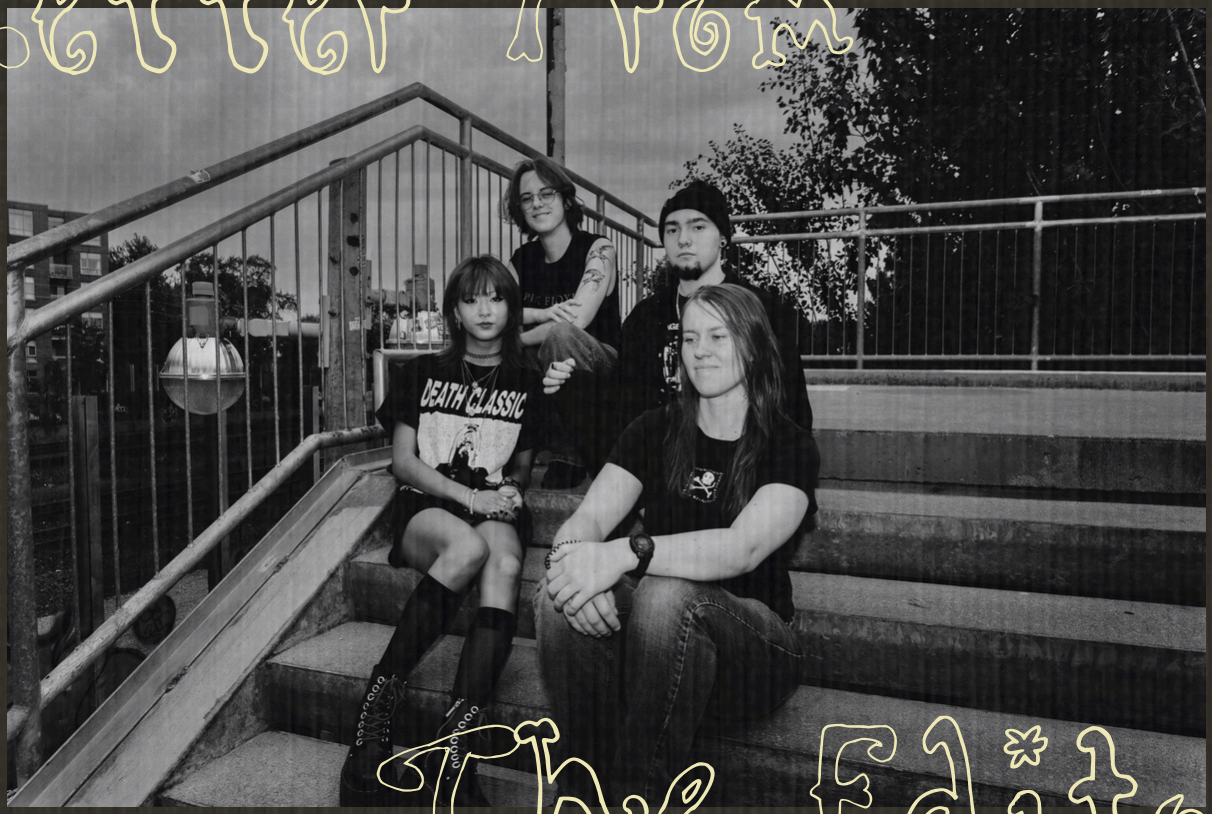
DEMO

SATURATION VOL.3

Yellow

UofT's only music magazine presents their last print issue of the year.

Letter from The Editors



We hate to say it, but here we are at Demo Magazine's final issue of the year. It's been a good one! With three print issues, four live shows featuring some amazing local artists, and an abundance of blog articles, dare we say Demo is at the strongest it's ever been? Maybe! Regardless, we hope that our hard work this year has helped to further our mission of bringing the UofT community a bit closer to the city's rich and expansive music scene.

Yellow will be our last volume under the theme of Saturation, where we've had a great time exploring the melancholy of Blue, the fierceness of Red, and finally... well, you should jump right into this issue to see what Yellow is all about!

Thank you to our team of immensely talented writers, photographers, and graphic designers who make this magazine possible. Thank you to every band we've had the pleasure of putting on a bill, and to every venue who's hosted us. And thank you, dear reader, for picking up this issue. It means everything to us.

Demo Magazine loves you. We'll be back soon.

— Finch, Shayla, Alec, and Serena

Table of Contents

3	*A Brief Introduction to Melted Bodies*	*Alec Zelek*
5	*Everyone Get More Pathetic Now: On Descendents and Vulnerability*	*Emma Dobrovnik*
6	*Liquid Gold: The Most Hated*	*Sanjana Iyer*
7	*Cardboard Catharsis*	*Sascha Pugar*
9	LUX - *ROSALÍA'S Golden Maximalist Masterpiece*	*Gabrielle John*
11	*AI, Community, and Minecraft Parodies*	*Zacharia Husain*
12	*Toxic Positivity and the Myth of the Healing Artist*	*Rose Kinoshita*
13	*Loserboy Music*	*Julian Apolinario*
15	*How Japanese Breakfast Made Me Hate Yellow Less*	*Julianna Pijar*
17	*Demo Red Show Recap*	*Various Photographers*

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MELTED BODIES

The first time I ever listened to Melted Bodies was on October 22nd, 2024. This is a fact I know with absolute certainty. I streamed the entirety of their discography between around 8:00 and 10:00 p.m. that day. Why am I telling you this? Well, because from the moment those wondrous little sinusoids graced the stereocilia of my inner ear, I knew I had found—No, that's not true actually. I didn't touch any of the SoCal outfit's work again until, um.

Uh.

February 20, 2025! See, that one I had to look up. But when I did put Melted Bodies back on the turntable, I knew I had (re)discovered something golden. The LA band's zany blend of late System of a Down–esque alt metal spiked with a heavy dose of electronica and pockmarked with extreme sensibilities scratched *that* part of my brain. The one that makes music sound just right. The product Melted Bodies serves up punches well above the weight of their popularity. They pack far more polish, more freshness, more *juice*, than their streaming metrics might suggest. So let's change that. Let this be your formal introduction to the crushing, offbeat quartet they call Melted Bodies.

Melted Bodies' full-length debut, *Enjoy Yourself*, hit the streets in fall of 2020. The record touches on themes in the modern milieu with sarcasm befitting its title: classic topics like anxiety, depression, consumerism, being devoured by swine... you get the picture. Tracks like "Club Anxious" and the notably pre-Mangione health insurance takedown "Funny Commercials" showcase the calling card of the project, as vocalist Andy Hamm tables bitter mockeries of societal issues with what can border on Will Wood levels of TikTok-ish sardonicism. Keyword 'can': whether the preceding is a plus or a minus to you, the witticism is usually kept in check without losing the brilliantly malapropos bubbliness that defines the album.

While *Enjoy Yourself*'s instrumentals can match its lyrics' strategic saccharinity, Melted Bodies also flexes a sonic diversity on the album which ranges from dynamic freneticism to sombre melancholia to everything in between. The guitar work regularly breaks from riff-oriented overdriven surf rock to incorporate more spacious powerchord progressions. Make no mistake, though—*Enjoy Yourself* brings its fair share of heavy. Melted Bodies frequently shakes hands with chugging riffs, never more eloquently than on the standout track "99 Scents," which features a brutal breakdown that is impossible to get enough of. Infernal thudding underpins Hamm's cries of "I can't stop the/Money violence!" in a meter that is addictively tricky to dissect. The metallic aspect of *Enjoy Yourself* is further cemented by the metalcore-ish screams that carry much of the LP's lyricism (alongside disconcerting parlando and a smattering of melody and death growls). Scott MacDonald's blitzkrieg blast beats and fibrotic crashes don't exactly lighten the load, either. Melted Bodies can pack a punch when desired, but they aren't beholden to the sound.

I fear you're getting the impression that Melted Bodies is yet another sometimes-maybe-metal band with a tenuous identity. This could not be further from the truth. Enter Ben Majoy, the band's keyboardist and their special sauce. Majoy's synth embellishments provide most of the gooey, meaty aesthetic that Melted Bodies revels in. Bright rockage belies a foreboding eeriness from atmospheric keyboards. Space permitted by the strings and kit are filled admirably with dastardly sawtooth leads and scaphic ambiance. Drum machines and unsettling synth lines lead on tracks like "Phone Tumor," but Ben Majoy is just as content to take a back seat and sprinkle a touch of unease beneath the otherwise bombastic guitars. These electronics liaise with the acerbic vocals and emotionally vacillating instrumentation of *Enjoy Yourself* in frankly bizarre fashion. This trademark weirdness coupled with Melted Bodies' discerning artistry makes *Enjoy Yourself* a magnum opus of whatever the hell genre it is.

But just what genre *is* Melted Bodies? "Killer" is about the only label I can put on the West coast crew: they defy categorization just as many of my most esteemed artists do. System of a Down is bucketed into nu metal but comes a far cry from the angsty raps of Korn or Limp Bizkit. Primus is... funk rock, I guess? but sounds nothing like the Chili Peppers. In the same vein, most publications that attempt to pigeonhole Melted Bodies call them "alternative metal," but the band bears no resemblance to name brand alt-metallers like Tool or Slipknot. I've seen some usage of "avant-metal," which I've really only ever heard to describe Mr. Bungle, who are significantly more Dadaist than what we're looking at. You could maybe make a case for metalcore, what with their incorporation of poppish choruses and techno elements, but Melted Bodies takes a completely different route than, say, Motionless in White. They choose to be ambitious with their sound and forge a brand new niche, and do it well enough to stack up to your favourite big name in metal.

The next and newest project from Melted Bodies comes in the form of *The Inevitable Fork*, a double-length album released in piecemeal beginning in 2022 before being finalized into a continuous 2024 LP. There's a lot more internal conflict with this one. Decisions, feelings, the paths we have to choose. More introspective stuff. Not so much of the societal jabbing from before. As the themes are a bit darker, thus follow the sonics: *The Inevitable Fork* features more low, methodical guitars and cuts back a touch on the rockishness. Even the mix feels more damped and steeped in gloom (a bit stronger on the low end, too—clearly bassist Houda Zakeri has more pull here than Newsted on *...And Justice For All*). Melted Bodies drives home the dreariness with connective interludes and tracks like "Talk Some More About It" that flaunt some compositional acumen. We've seen this acoustic morosity on *Enjoy Yourself* with "Helplessness," but the 2024 double LP kicks it up a notch.

The Inevitable Fork presents a different direction for Melted Bodies, but it still carries the band's character. The title track illustrates this to a tee. It still touts some delicious mid-range licks and those classic trawling synths, but also a melodic refrain, more acrid verses, and poignant lyrics on the fallibility of running from yourself with Western daily monotony. "The Inevitable Fork" even borrows some lines from the last couple tracks of *Enjoy Yourself*: a grim blend of old and new. Songs like "Therapy" and "Liars" carry a creepy cheerfulness that's reminiscent of *Enjoy Yourself*, but with an extra gash of dismay. "Liars" is probably my favourite cut off *The Inevitable Fork*, actually. It's got this neat galloping chorus that goes, "I told you nothing was wrong/That's a ~liiieeeee~" with this wacky vibrato that Andy Hamm loves to put on. I think he does it by literally shaking his head back and forth. God, I love when he does that. "Our commercials ~suuuure are funny, though.~" Hehe. Wait, wrong album. Look, *The Inevitable Fork* may not be as much of a slam dunk as Melted Bodies' debut, but there's plenty of fine material to be found within.

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Hm? Oh, I should probably explain the intro, shouldn't I. Yeah, no, thanks for reminding me. Normally I'd say that the 22nd is a day that I wasn't planning to make it through, but I don't really know how true that is. Why would I have chosen a new artist to drown my thoughts as I trudged an hour and a half from the subway station to my supposed end? Why would I try something for the first time if I thought I was reaching my last time? Sometimes I think that it's a sign I never really wanted it. That there's a reason nothing happened and I'm here writing about it. That there's something in me that keeps me coming back to the music I heard. I don't know. I don't have many answers for that day. Maybe that's ok. Maybe there isn't a reason why. Maybe it's enough to know that I'm here. Maybe it's enough to say that I like this band and that I hope you will, too.

WRITTEN BY
ALEC ZELEK
DESIGNED BY
SERENA HAO

Everyone Get More Pathetic Now: On Descendents and Vulnerability

Written by Emma Dobrovnik
Designed by Serena Hao

When I was 13, I wanted nothing more than to be taken seriously. This manifested in the music I listened to, the books I read, and the way I dressed. My prized possessions consisted of my mom's signed copy of Henry Rollins' *Get in the Van*, my subscription to *Ms. Magazine*, and my collection of My Chemical Romance enamel pins. The only photo on my Instagram circa 2014 was a #WCW post dedicated to Kathleen Hanna. My very essence screamed, "I'm smarter than most adults, and I know it. I'm even angry about it."

When I first heard Descendents, I was in the car with my aunt. I remember being upset about something, and I was probably justified in being upset. But from the moment the opening chords of "Myage" escaped her tinny car radio, I was sold. In retrospect, my pre-teen love of a band that waxes poetic about shitting in the woods didn't make much sense on paper. Born between the summer of seventh and eighth grade, my obsession didn't seem to align with my identity as a politically sensitive Smart Girl™. Descendents are crass, sweaty, and grotesque in a way that is uniquely reminiscent of a teenage boy. I mean, it makes sense. For a time, the band members were teenage boys noodling around with their instruments, and that do-it-yourself indignation permeates the band's discography. Their mascot—fashioned after the likes of their frontman, Milo Aukerman—is crudely drawn, and is even depicted wearing a diaper on their 1985 album, *I Don't Want to Grow Up*. As a kid who hated being a kid, I didn't relate. I couldn't wait to be an adult. But I also couldn't help tearing through Descendents' discography on every road trip.

They've been described as the punk rock Beach Boys, and a quick Google search of the band members in their heyday confirms that this is a fair assessment. They're all thick-rimmed glasses, crew cuts, and odes to the girl next door. They may deliver a damning critique of the upper-middle class, but songs like "Silly Girl" ("When you're just a silly boy like me you're always so scared/I was too scared to love you, even though I really cared") establish that Descendents are a far cry from Circle Jerks' Reaganite rebellion. I'll always have a soft spot for the messy vitriol of early hardcore, but there's something novel about how Descendents substituted destruction for devotion. Half of their lyrics loosely reference bodily fluids (listen to "Van"), but the other half are more akin to the ramblings of a lovestruck teenager. You've got a bespectacled frontman wailing longingly about his ex-girlfriend, but his sappiness is tempered by a relentless drum beat and proto-skate punk guitar riffs.

Descendents are inherently wimpy, and I mean that as nothing but an endorsement. In a scene fuelled by unbridled machismo, singing about how you're more interested in befriending a girl than fucking her was tantamount to suicide. Was it lame? Some definitely thought so. But Descendents didn't care, and this might be the most hardcore thing about them. They carved out a space where angst and tenderness don't only coexist, but reinforce each other. Their ethos was both about resisting the status quo and embracing the humble beginnings of a first love. It's very "meet me in the pit, but hold my hand while we mosh." Unafraid to wear their hearts on their sleeves, the band's love song aesthetic placed them squarely at the intersection of rage and romance. This synthesis between seemingly incompatible extremes—anger and vulnerability—is what makes them the founding fathers of pop punk. They may have attracted their fair share of critics, but their music's levity spoke to the broader tension that characterized my adolescence.

For all the resentment I felt towards the world, I was still a kid. I wanted to believe that I was above it all—the insecurity, the need for acceptance, and the general paralysis that defines life at 13. I hoped my blue hair and army jacket communicated that I didn't have anything in common with my small-town peers, and I didn't want to fit in, either. After all, an aspiring Carrie Brownstein shouldn't concern herself with the opinion of a kid in a Bass Pro Shops cap. But despite my outward hostility, I still wanted people to like me. I wanted boys to think I was pretty, and I wanted girls to compliment my poorly drawn eyeliner. I'd convinced myself that the hormonal shitshow of adolescence was beneath me. I didn't need to bother with crushes or friends, because I wasn't like that. While I clung to my jadedness, the Descendents were dichotomous; their corrosiveness wasn't undercut by their sensitivity.

I may have channeled my rage through fervent Bikini Kill relistens, but Descendents served a different purpose in my life. They provided a means of exploring the soft, mushy parts of myself I hadn't yet come to terms with. It's been a decade since I discovered them, and as I get older I only identify more with life's growing pains. I'm no longer harboring a middle school crush or arguing with my high school principal, but I sometimes feel like a kid playing dress-up. When I feel that way, I often throw on *Milo Goes to College*. Somehow, I can't find it in me to cringe at Descendents the same way I do with my other teenage fixations. There's an honesty in professing your feelings for someone else, and there's dignity in a post-breakup sob. Descendents taught me that there's nothing trivial or embarrassing about being unabashedly sensitive. I hope that ten years from now, I won't have forgotten what it feels like to lose sleep over a first date, and I hope that I still cry at the movies. When I first heard Descendents, I couldn't find it in me to be a kid. At 23, I wish I'd softened sooner.

LIQUID GOLD:

WRITTEN BY SANJANA IYER

DESIGNED BY JULIANNA PIJAR

THE MOST HATED

Polyphia's *The Most Hated* (2017) is my golden child.

I'm a loyalist, and since hearing "The Worst" off their 2017 EP, I've held invariably and unalterably that this is my favourite song of all time. I've had a long history with this track, starting in April of 2021 when I heard it for the first time. There was an immediate spark—a jolt of lightning that drew me magnetically into its warm, tonal embrace.

For some history, Polyphia's second ever EP, *The Most Hated* marked the debut of their new drummer Clay Aeschliman. It was a sort of milestone EP that edified their place in the prog scene, which was hot around that time. With Jason Richardson's *I* and Animals As Leaders' *Madness of Many* dropping the year prior, and Chon's *Homey* releasing a month earlier, *The Most Hated* was in good company. Early fans would probably still have classified Polyphia as more of a djent artist before this EP, and maybe even before their 2016 album *Renaissance*. But this EP IS prog in the truest sense of the genre. Veering from their energetic, whammy-abusing, drop D die-hard projects like *Inspire* (2013) and *Muse* (2014), *The Most Hated* takes on much darker undertones with melodic minors, exploring a kind of maturity that has seen them through to the height of their popularity in one of their most streamed songs, "G.O.A.T."

The Most Hated is also a testament to the efficacy of good visualizers in the music consumption experience. The synchronicity of its syncopating beats and the looping gold visuals guide the senses through this quasi-psychedelic adventure. Having watched and rewatched the videos for "Loud," "Goose," and "The Worst," I've now unlocked the ability to just close my eyes and picture the accompanying visualizers while the first note sets the mental stage.

On a personal level, this EP holds a place of radiating warmth in my heart. Before my chemistry final in grade 12, bordering on an anxiety attack, my body sent the one self-preservative S.O.S. it knew. There, standing behind a car outside the exam hall, the shitty speaker holes of my phone pressed against my ear, I played "The Worst." In what might as well have been a Pavlovian response, my heart slowed down and I regained the composure needed to go write the exam. I recalled this experience vividly when I first heard what is now my favourite version of the song—the one that's live from the Factory in Deep Ellum (2023). This version encapsulates, for me, everything that it is to be a Polyphia fan. Back to their roots in Dallas, the performance in Deep Ellum captures the essence of the years of work the band have put in to accrue their now thriving fanbase. As a relatively new fan, nothing made me feel more at home than that video. I cried the first time I heard that version of my favourite song.

More recently, I've had the privilege of seeing Polyphia live (Thank you, Alec!), where they played "The Worst" as part of their set. Instinctively, my eyes closed, picturing the liquid gold skulls and the blooming petals from the visualizer. It was perfect.

Cardboard Catharsis

Written by Sascha Pugar **Designed by Evelyn Li**

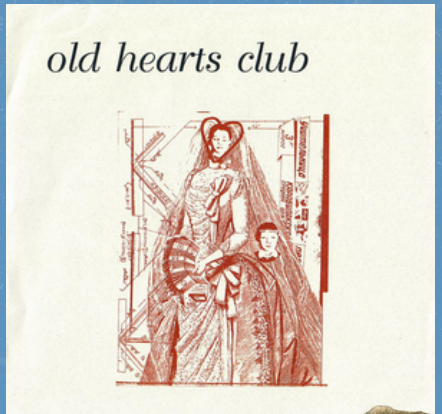
In a medium so shrouded in saturated markets and endless advertising, there comes a need for independent artists. We should always have the true say in the music we surround ourselves with, rather than being influenced by trending algorithms. Supporting local scenes and genres is what makes unheard voices come to light. While this sentiment is not even remotely new, we must reflect on the distribution practices that predate our internet age in order to disconnect from algorithmic content. There was no SoundCloud or cheap distrokid to market music to anyone worldwide. It was constrained and limited, despite the desire to spread the word as far as possible. Despite these limits, bands of the emo movement would make use of a scrappy, DIY style that circumvented their low budgets and went on to define their aesthetic for decades to come.

As punk rock's popularity started to be overthrown by new wave and synthpop in the mid 80s, an odd cultural shift bloomed out of the DC punk scene. Moving away from the traditional anger-fest of Bad Brains and Minor Threat, "Emotional hardcore" was the birth of emo music—a genre defined by young 20-somethings letting you know loud and clear how deep their feelings were. To be sad, angry, hopeless and hopeful all at once is a wild ride for anyone, but emo artists let these feelings motivate some of the most emotionally complex and nuanced music ever created.

I love surfing through the endless demos and local releases of emo bands spanning the 90s-00s. I sit overwhelmed by chaotic riffs, violent screams and light speed drumming on one demo, only to be comforted by soul-crushing melancholy and midwestern twang on the next. Every time I go searching for new demos, I cannot help but notice the same colour used over and over again for the covers of these projects. A pale, textured brown akin to cardboard is everywhere. For a genre so rich with emotion, why are all the album covers so simple?

By the early 90s, emo had marketed itself enough to spread across the United States, thanks mostly to Rites of Spring. The style was at a slow moving point, and budgets were as low as ever. Combine this with an analog approach of recording the entire band playing at once (opposed to mixing each instrument in post), and you land at the 7" vinyl as the preferred form of distribution. As California band Heroin was working on their 1992 EP *Heroin*, they ran into the hurdle of mass produced packaging being costly. The solution? Shove the vinyl in a paper bag from Ralph's supermarket, stamp it with a decal and call it a day. I adore the primal rawness of these handmade experiments. It was extremely practical while simultaneously being completely absurd, all while allowing for full creative expression. The uneven textures, creases, and imperfections unique to every copy made it feel as if the band was performing in your own basement.

This trend would catch on quickly in California, with Platypus Scourge releasing *Life is Colder* later that same year packaged in literal cardboard. By 1993, this practice of using the cheapest material you could get your hands on had spread across the country. This DIY aesthetic really made its mark with Indian Summer's self-titled EP from 1993, using stapled pieces of cardboard to house one of the most influential releases from the entire second wave of emo.



Throughout the rest of this second wave, bands were packaging their releases in cardboard, chipboard, paper bags, and massive yellow Manila Envelopes. Decals, paper cutouts, and even pieces of thread and ribbon would then be pasted on top to the artist's liking. All things you can purchase for cheap at Staples, or better yet, find in your parents' basement. Perhaps the most famous release to adopt this crafty style was the 1997 self-titled EP by Everyone Asked About You, dropping one of the most on-the-nose lines to describe the emotions of the movement: "There's an ache in my bones and I can feel it." This influence spread far and never left the hearts of many emo artists. Bands all the way across the Atlantic were using this same approach, such as Russia's Marschak and Italy's Jasmin (who wins first place in the cheap game, as they used flimsy school lunch bags to house their demo cassette). Bands who made professionally recorded works like Orchid and Cap'n Jazz referenced their original grassroots packaging by making their covers appear to have the same colour and textures, despite being clean cut and mass produced. Even in contemporary fifth wave emo, many bands keep the same aesthetic despite covers being fully digital, a personal favourite being Mondrary's 2025 album *No Better Than Man*. The last track on the album is aptly titled "Catharsis," a full circle moment for the original DIY goals created 40 years earlier.

I find there are a select few albums that best exemplify the depths of emotion this style of packaging was paired with. *Come Sail Away* by Shallows and Flats is a 3 minute demo tape consisting of nauseating tempo switches and screeched vocals, sounding like the band members are actively escaping the depths of hell. This chaos is contrasted by the softspoken, poignant beauty of *Acoustic* by Blueprint, a demo consisting of lush string sections and echoed drums over quiet, melancholic vocals. What if we took these ideas and made it more midwestern? You arrive at Old Hearts Club's self titled EP, a culmination of the rawness I've grown a deep fascination for. The twang of the guitars and the strained, buried vocals make me nostalgic for a time I never lived in. It's not nostalgic because it's happy, but rather it reminds me of the subtle loneliness of being a teenager in western suburbia, which is something I've grown to miss in the bustle of the city.

The analog recording style emo artists used provided a hidden stylistic benefit. If the whole band plays at once, the vocals lose priority in the mix, making the voice function more as an instrument than a delivery of meaning. Do you see it now? The meaning is not just in the lyrics, it's in everything about these records. The uniquely personal packaging, the buzz of the recording equipment, the quirks of guitar tone and unfiltered breaths between phrases. This is why we call it emo: we emotionally latch onto such subtle aspects, which makes it an endeavour so distinctly human. The next time I open Spotify and see new bands using various shades of tan on their covers, I'll be reminded of the fight it represents—a fight to get artistic voices out to the world. It's no arts and crafts project, it's cardboard catharsis.

LUX - ROSALÍA'S GOLDEN MAXIMALIST MASTERPIECE

Spring calls for tones of effervescent joy and radiant light, and ROSALÍA'S *LUX* is its crown jewel. Rich in its baroque and maximalist sound, the album's title captures the distinct light one sees beyond cracks and openings—a profound yellow glow. *LUX* is a labour of love. Through all the sweat, tears, and features (notably, Patti Smith, Björk, and the London Symphony Orchestra), ROSALÍA pushes herself thematically, lyrically, and tonally. She "finishes the thought" and goes all the way until the end, a stark departure from her previous works.

In *LUX*, ROSALÍA positions herself between god and the earth, with an operatic ending of arriving at heaven through the sacrifice of her life. While it is ultimately a death, it is nothing short of beautiful. Death is essentially revered. As she declares in her Apple Music interview with Zane Lowe, "Don't be sad when I die, please have a party." She celebrates death in all forms, wherever, through whomever. *LUX* captures iterations of otherness, using light as both an aesthetic and a metaphysical device.

The album begins with "Sexo, Violencia y Llantas," which encapsulates ROSALÍA'S entrance into heaven, explores numerous saints, and closes with death on earth. The opening piano keys spiral you into where she's headed–nothing short of purity, beauty and brightness. Its intro is exactly what a great desire or wish sounds like, pulling the listener into the declaration of what she so inherently wants. "Quién pudiera vivir entre los dos primero amar el mundo y luego amarle a dios" translates to "Who could live between the two? First love the world, and then love god." This is the map she paints of *LUX*, the blueprint to where she is going, with the end goal to give it all to god eternally, to reach light and beauty in its final form.

"Reliquia" follows with bright staccato strings. We follow Saint Rose of Lima, who was deeply dismayed due to her beauty. Not by her own accord, but by the men who would gawk at her for it. Saint Rose would have nothing of it—she cut off her hair and rubbed peppers on her face to shut these distractions out and become closer to god. Similarly, ROSALÍA is positioned in the space of Saint Rose, as *LUX* is a devotion to god and all of his saints. She posits herself as an extension of the saint and connects to her otherness. She closes the piece with "But hair grows back, and purity too/Purity is in me, and it's in Marrakech/No, no, I'm not a saint, but I'm blessed."

With Catalan roots, "Divinize" spins you into the paradise of the Garden of Eden. There stands a rattling drum beat, a pulse, and an anxiety sung through: "Through my body, you can see the light/Bruise me up, I'll eat all of my pride/I know that I was made to divinize." Again, by alluding to light, she acknowledges the divide between her humanity and the divinity that begins to creep in.

Next, "Porcelana" centers around Ryōnen, a Japanese monk and teacher. Much like Saint Rose of Lima, Ryōnen burned off her beautiful face in order to be admitted to a monastery. Ryōnen's story is intended to mirror ROSALÍA as she enters this state of change and sacrifice, blurring the line between herself as an omniscient and integrated narrator. In response to Zane Lowe's question of whether or not she considers Ryōnen's actions extreme, ROSALÍA replied: "Who am I to judge what is extreme?" At the song's climax, the choir echoes so intensely through a euphoric crescendo that I felt as if I could reach heaven with her. *This* is sanctity through self-erasure.

We are then segued into the masterpiece, "Mio Cristo Piage Diamanti." This is an Italian aria (and a personal favourite of mine), which took ROSALÍA a whole year to master. It explores the spiritual bond and emotional relationship between Saint Clare and Saint Francis of Assisi. Through the linked otherness of the two, pure light shines through. My favourite line translates to, "Imperfect, agents of chaos/We dismantle ourselves like myths/My king of anarchy/My favourite reckless star."

The next song marked the beginning of ROSALÍA's iconic new era: the single "Berghain." In this song, she captures glorious golden maximalism full throttle. Berghain, Berlin's high church of techno, becomes a cathedral of modern devotion in ROSALÍA's hands. The legendary Björk adds confessions and doctrines in this collaboration: "The only way to save us is through divine intervention." Following the deeply personal tie from an ex-engagement, ROSALÍA highlights how god remains a constant, especially when men let you down, in "La Perla." "De Madrugá" sticks out as it highlights the Ukrainian Saint Olga of Kyiv. The intensity of the track, with sharp percussion, deep breaths, and soaring chivalrous orchestral accompaniment, captures Olga (ruler of Kyivan Rus)'s revenge after her husband Igor is murdered by the Drevelians. She ruled while her son grew up and later went down in history for her merciless subjugation of the Drevlians to avenge the death of her husband. The song closes with a depiction of dawn, pulling us to light and to closure, whatever the shape of that closure may be.

With “La Yugular,” the track holds purely heavenly choirs, echoing her vocal projection and closes with the words of Patti Smith, “Seven Heavens? Big deal, I wanna see the eighth heaven, tenth heaven, thousandth heaven, you know, it's like, break on through to the other side. It's like going through one door, one door isn't enough, a million doors aren’t enough.” Smith, who often writes and performs on the topic of “otherness” and iterations of light, coincides with *LUX’s* thesis, while simultaneously pushing it further towards the concept of infinite heavens. Preaching to the listeners, Smith’s voice expands the scope of LUX beyond what one could even conjure.

“Sauvignon Blanc” transitions seamlessly from “La Yugular” as we draw her journey to near closure. This track is deeply tender and intimate, placing the listener right in the centre of the journey. This song was chosen as a single, accompanied by a stunning music video where ROSALÍA is carried up into the air by an invisible figure, which is presumably god.

To close out her journey on Earth, “Magnolias” is a perfect, tear-jerking finale. The opulence and raw emotions of the closing track are indescribable. The song sends off the album by encapsulating the end of her journey—she has finally closed the circle. The track opens with a smooth clarinet scale as her voice ascends, then (with a lack of loops) she repeats “Tírame magnolias”(throw me magnolias). A choir elevates her statement into an abyss beyond the skies, with a tone bathed in light.

In *LUX*, ROSALÍA directly stages transcendence. If *MOTOMAMI* was fragmentation, *LUX* is a completion: a work that begins in desire and ends in dust, only to suggest that dust itself glows. Her narrative circle closes with radiance. *LUX* is a masterpiece of shadows and beams of light, powerfully transporting the listener to eternal life.

Written by Gabrielle John
Designed by Louise Lee

AI, Community, and Minecraft Parodies

WRITTEN BY
ZACHARIA HUSAIN

DESIGNED BY
EVELYN LI

Being nine years old back in 2014 meant thinking that block characters waxing poetic about the dangers of mining at night was the peak of humanity's musical output. For adolescent minds newly experiencing popular culture, there was no bigger musical movement than that of the *Minecraft* parody. While musical parody is not a new concept, for the first time in history it formed a community unto itself. Flashing forward to 2026 with AI generation in music on the rise, I have begun to wonder if these communities are at risk of being a concept lost to time. Would we have Minecraft parodies in a post-AI world?

"Revenge" – A Minecraft Parody by CaptainSparklez
305M Views

For those who didn't grow up during the *Minecraft* boom of the early 2010s or who may have missed the hype train, the idea of a niche musical parody genre becoming a full-fledged community may come across as absurd. With most people's exposure to musical parody ending at "Weird Al" Yankovic, it's easy to see how forming a community around this genre of music could be dismissed. However, the sheer impact that *Minecraft* had on popular culture during its heyday created an environment where such a home could form. With young kids eager to consume as much *Minecraft* content as possible, combining a major interest and music led to the perfect storm. Parodies soon took over YouTube, raking in hundreds of millions of views.

For an idea of the sound that dominated the *Minecraft* parody landscape, we can look to its most popular song, CaptainSparklez's "Revenge." Sitting at over 300 million views, the song parodies Usher's "DJ Got Us Fallin' In Love" and reimagines its inspiration into a tune about fighting 'creepers,' an enemy in the game. While heavily borrowing from the original, the instrumental of "Revenge" is arranged in a way that makes the song very clearly its own, utilizing sound effects from the game in its composition. On YouTube, Usher's original is inundated with comments comparing it to the parody. Even today, I expect to hear the *Minecraft* version as Usher's familiar synth lead starts to blast.

Eventually, *Minecraft* parody would transform beyond its roots. The lead vocals on "Revenge" were performed by musical parody pioneer TryHardNinja, who would continue to collaborate with CaptainSparklez on the "Viva la Vida" spoof "Fallen Kingdom." While the Coldplay parody is massively popular, what are less well-known are its three sequels, each being original songs made by the duo. The anthology comes together to form a multipart epic telling the tale of a king fighting against the tyrannical forces of the *Minecraft* world. Even to this day, TryHardNinja still makes video game–inspired songs for various franchises. The *Minecraft* parody genre had evolved into a celebration of the game and the people who enjoyed it.

Watching these parodies back, you begin to see not just the effort that went into producing these songs but the dedication to the community at large. One of my favorite parts of these music videos is when the creator pops in at the end of the video to thank the viewer for watching. While hilariously dated by today's standards, it's so charming to see such a direct call to the listener, an action directly influenced by the platform these songs came from. The communities surrounding these parodies thrived as people became inspired to make their own songs or engage with others' music. Despite a fall in *Minecraft* parody popularity over the years, video game parody has remained a large ecosystem for subsequent generations of kids on the internet. Franchises like *Five Nights at Freddy's* have parody economies surpassing that of *Minecraft*, with bands like The Living Tombstone being launched into stardom by their *FNAF* work. As I have aged, parodies are no longer a part of my musical diet. However, kids today are being brought up on parodies of their favorite games, songs which they might write zine articles for in ten years' time.

I say all of this for a reason. Mikey Shulman, CEO of Suno, the premier AI music tool, has gone on record multiple times to say that the future of music is personalized. Shulman envisions a musical landscape where people only listen to the songs they want to hear, generated exactly to their tastes. In his world, engaging in a community involves an onslaught of slop regurgitated between fans, satiating every need inside of a fandom. For Shulman, were *Minecraft* parodies to have a resurgence, they would be created not from a place of love for the source but out of obligation to produce more content for the masses. You want the latest hit covered? Here you go! The 3D animations for your music video? AI generate them! The magic that was seeing a new release from your favorite YouTuber and watching it with your friends disappears. There is no community under Suno. Thinking about the ways "Revenge" impacted my childhood, I can scarcely imagine a world in which kids today look back longingly at an AI generated *Fortnite* parody of "Espresso."

I hope that kids today get to experience the joy of having high-quality parody songs made for their favourite games. Musicians like TryHardNinja and CG5 carry on the legacy left by *Minecraft* parodies for a new generation, but as AI in music continues to grow, how much longer can these communities thrive? There is something special in the bonds I can share with my peers knowing they likely listened to the same songs as I did, irrespective of where we grew up. Here's hoping that can last for generations to come.

Toxic Positivity and the Myth of the Healing Artist

Written by Rose Kinoshita
Designed by Miya Mastrofini

Did you know Robarts Library offers the use of light therapy lamps on the fourth and fifth floors? As someone who spends way too much time at Robarts, I've read most, if not all, of the posters in the building. While most of them are seasonal or advertising particular events, the SAD lamp ad has been on the 13th floor for as long as I can remember. "In the Sun, I feel as one." – Kurt Cobain. The first time I spotted this poster, I thought I had been studying too long and was hallucinating. Surely the university would know better than to use a quote by noted 27 Club member Kurt Cobain on its anti-depression light advertisement? Apparently not.

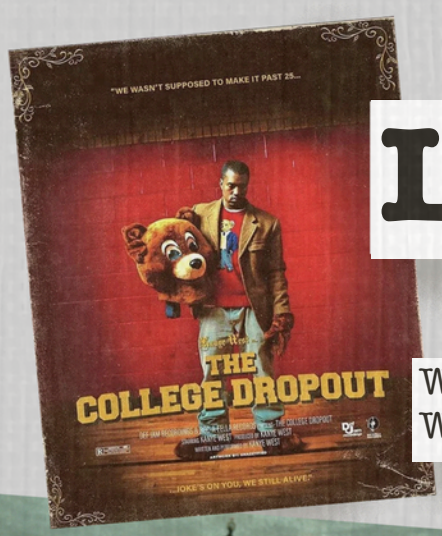
It would be one thing to credit the quote to Nirvana or "All Apologies"—maybe the person who designed the poster simply didn't know who was behind them—it's something else entirely to quote Kurt Cobain specifically, turning his lyric into a wellness slogan advertising a solution to what he didn't survive. That's the part that makes this particularly memorable. Not just the bad taste, but what it reveals about the music industry. How the culture orbiting it capitalizes on pain. We extract a line, polish it until it shines, and pretend the story had a cleaner ending than it did. People prefer tragedy to be inspirational, and this instinct shows up everywhere now. On TikTok and Instagram, artists narrate their mental health in real time. You see them posting about anxiety and burnout; fans and critics immediately respond with thousands of comments, a flood of love and support or hate and disparagement.

But this isn't a new reflex born from social media. The music industry has long known how to package anguish. From the romanticization of the 'tortured genius' to the marketing of posthumous releases, tragedy has always had commercial appeal. The so-called '27 Club' includes artists like Amy Winehouse, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin whose deaths are discussed with an almost narrative neatness, as if early endings are an inevitable side effect of brilliance. Streaming platforms amplify this framing: when an artist dies, their streams spike. Lyrics that once read as confessional become prophetic, feeding into the content output via documentaries and tributes. Even album cycles are built around breakdowns and comebacks, with publicists framing vulnerability as authenticity, leading suffering to become part of the brand architecture. Recovery is marketable, too, creating an ecosystem where pain is rarely allowed to simply exist. It must signify something. It must build toward something. It must teach. And when it doesn't, when someone dies, or relapses, or disappears, we scramble to retrofit meaning onto the absence.

Parasocial culture turns listeners into stakeholders in an artist's emotional stability. Fans don't just consume songs anymore. They consume vitality, monitoring wellness, tracking whether someone seems 'okay,' and celebrating visible recovery. And when an artist doesn't improve on schedule, you see concern morph into frustration. Toxic positivity thrives in that environment; pain is acceptable only if it's part of a redemption arc. You can be depressed, but you should also be healing. You can be overwhelmed, but you should be grateful. If you're lucky enough to have a platform, the thinking goes, you owe people.

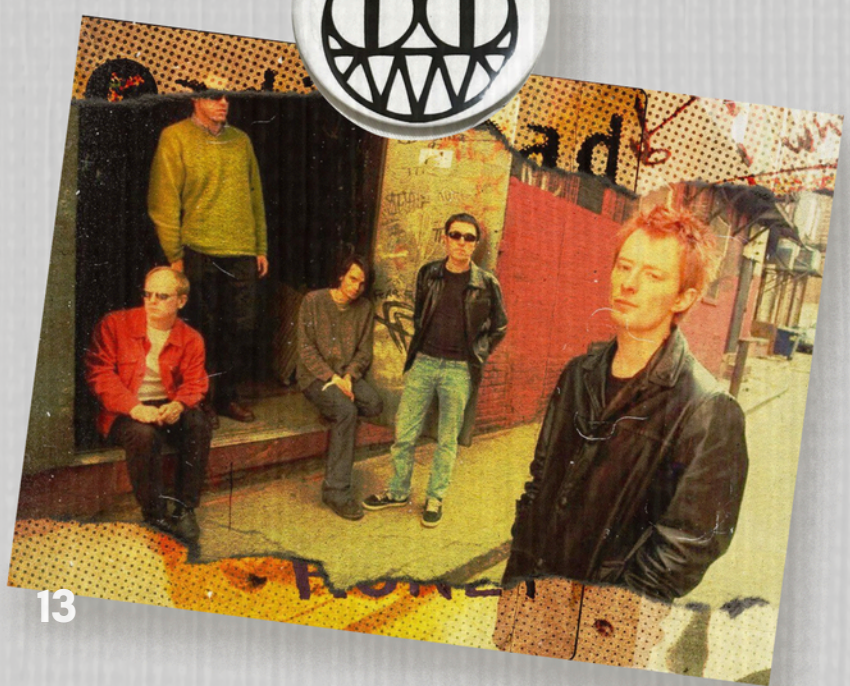
The pressure to model resilience doesn't just distort public narratives, but private ones, too. Artists learn quickly which emotions are brand-safe. Vulnerability, but framed as growth; struggle, but with a lesson attached. There's little space for unresolved grief, for chronic mental illness, for the possibility that some battles don't wrap up in a neat press cycle along with an album release or the announcement of a tour. And when we retroactively turn someone like Cobain into a motivational speaker, we're smoothing over the harsh truth. We're implying that the right mindset, or the right product, could have rewritten the ending. That if he'd just stayed in the sun, maybe things would be different. But that's not how depression works, and suggesting otherwise, even indirectly, deepens the stigma for people who don't 'recover' visibly or quickly. It frames suicide as a failure of optimism instead of a complex, devastating outcome of illness and circumstance.

The light therapy poster isn't responsible for Cobain's death, obviously. But it is part of a broader cultural reflex: to turn suffering into something consumable, sellable, and solvable. A lyric becomes a slogan, a tragedy becomes a lesson, and a lamp becomes a solution. Supposedly. I've never actually gone to use one.



Loserboy Music

What "Creep," comedians, and Kanye West all have in common



Written by Julian Apolinario
Designed by Serena Hao

There was always music in my house, in an ambient sense. Movie soundtracks, jazz piano, and stomp-clap-hey indie in the living room with my mother, and hard rock in the basement with my dad. But that was always their music. As I got older, I got really into hip-hop. First with Eminem, like many other suburban white kids, and then his labelmates Dr. Dre and 50 Cent. I branched out into Nas, Wu-Tang Clan, Mobb Deep, and Biggie pretty quickly, but it wasn't until high school that I got really into the music of Kanye West.

I had always been a very casual listener to the big hits—"POWER," "Stronger," "Heartless"—but it was really the album competition between him and Drake that cemented my fandom for West's music and the mythology surrounding it. Kanye's *Donda* and Drake's *Certified Lover Boy* were set to come out at the same time in 2021, with Kanye pushing back the release date seemingly in an effort to spoil Drake's drop. That was really the time I started to go back to West's earlier discography, exploring his earlier stuff like *The College Dropout*.

It's been a long time since 2021. Since then, Kanye has come out as a Nazi, divorced his wife, been banned from social media, started a new group called ¥$, and generally ruined his reputation to the point that I no longer consider myself a fan of his, with no amount of apologizing on his part able to change that. But I still think about him a lot, especially in connection to high school memories. And one day, I had an epiphany:

Kanye West was a loser.

Granted, he is a loser now because of the horrible racism, but before the shutter shades and the TV star wife and the fashion company and the millions of dollars, Kanye was wearing backpacks and Ralph Lauren on stage, rapping about dropping out of school. That's not cool. But the levels of uncoolness run so deep into the heart of this guy's music that we need to go beyond Kanye West to understand.

Comedian Patrice O'Neal has a bit where he talks about how white people love "Creep" by Radiohead —for our purposes, the most quintessential loser anthem in existence—and how the singer is a loser, especially in comparison to the woman he is singing both to and about. O'Neal describes this feeling: "It's something about this song, it digs deep to this *loserdom*... White people have this innate thing where they want to feel bad. That's why they voted for Barack! It's like, 'I'm a creep, I didn't own slaves, but I'm a weirdo!' "

Let's dispense with the racial aspect of this and apply the idea to all people. Human beings have the capacity not only to *want* to feel bad, but specifically to think of themselves as socially ostracized, lesser than. There's an interview that was posted in 2010 where Kanye's asked about his favourite record, naming the 1992 album *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde* by the Pharcyde, a California rap group. I think we can assume that Kanye, born in 1977, would have been listening to *Bizarre Ride* in high school (or at least during his young adulthood), a formative period. *Bizarre Ride* is an album I like a lot as well; excellent production is combined with unique vocal delivery to make it one I consistently come back to. But the more I listen to it, the more I realize that the guys in the Pharcyde frequently play this stock character that I can only describe as 'the pre-2010s American loser.'

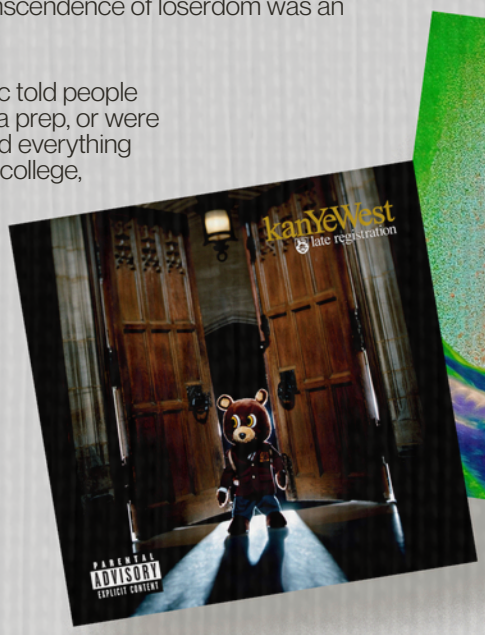
The second single on *Bizarre Ride* is called "Passin' Me By," a record about pining for a girl at school who's taken and feeling like she won't give you the time of day. In the last verse, Fatlip bemoans feeling like "such a wimp" and receiving a love letter back, marked "return to sender." Single three, "4 Better or 4 Worse," interpolates a phone call skit that's half loverboy, half serial killer, almost like the beginning of *Scream*. The fourth single, "Otha Fish," is about a similar topic to "Passin' Me By," keeping your chin up after getting dumped because there are "otha fish" out there. The Pharcyde tells listeners to "never simp, pimp, and leave your love life limp." Granted, I am cherry picking parts of these songs to get an idea across, but I think that it's important to understand Kanye as a person whom these songs resonated with, not only from a musical standpoint but also from the perspective of a young guy who can relate to the feeling of being a loser.

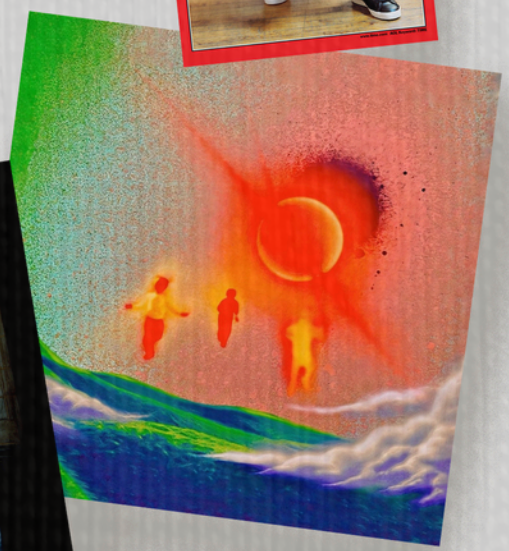
It's no secret that Kanye entered the rap game with something to prove. The guy was different: a producer-turned-rapper who hadn't been in the streets—a stark contrast to his mentor, the crack-rapping and crack-dealing JAY-Z, and to his competitors like the swole, ammunition-toting gangsta rapper 50 Cent. 50's iconic song "Many Men" is about the assassination attempt he survived after being shot nine times. Kanye West's song about his own trauma is called "Through the Wire," detailing the effects of a car crash. Parallel paths, similar development, but Kanye was just different in the landscape of early 2000s hip-hop. I'm not saying not being tough makes you a loser, but in the popular imagination, Kanye didn't exactly fit the idea of cool at the time. As such, Kanye reinvented cool for a lot of people as he got famous, but it would be a long time before he had the clout and cachet to do that.

Before that, the theme of being a loser was apparent throughout Kanye's music. Take "Drive Slow" off of his 2005 album *Late Registration*. "Drive Slow" is about the pleasures of being a young man cruising Chicago in a car at 16, having lots of sex, and being "the man." Except in that song, Kanye's main character isn't himself. Rather, his perspective comes in later, where he describes his teenage self as "a virgin, a baby," desperate to pick up women at the mall, restrained from doing too much by the more experienced friend who tells him to "drive slow." In West's cut from *The College Dropout,* "Get Em High," he raps about using the name of rapper Talib Kweli to flirt with a woman, asking him to prove that they know each other so that he can "give her dick all the time/And get her high." Kweli responds in his verse with faux exasperation, laying down a solid response. But years later, Kanye would degrade Kweli on a podcast, something will.i.am would say was foreshadowed by the way West pretended to act towards him in that song.

Kanye West—Ye, now—is a shell of himself. He sits isolated, no longer the energetic youngster, multimedia mogul, or public figure he once was. But before the money and the fame, Kanye was a loser, in the way so many people are. I think that, long before he became the pop-culture icon of the 2010s, it was the very essence of loserdom that made Kanye such a popular figure. Not only that people like to laugh at the antics of someone whose life isn't going right, but that West's transcendence of loserdom was an aspirational goal for his listeners.

Kanye stood out from the rest of the rap game; his music told people that even if they didn't have an exciting life, dressed like a prep, or were flat broke, there was someone out there who understood everything about them. In Kanye's eyes, even if you dropped out of college, it wasn't the end of the world. West's legions of fans, whether they want to admit it or not, probably see some of that loserdom in themselves and receive catharsis through his ascension out of that pit. For a long time, relating to that music was a way to get in touch with those emotions. Now, though? To love him is to sink to his level.





HOW JAPANESE BREAKFAST MADE ME HATE YELLOW LESS

I used to hate yellow. It's too bright, too insistent, and too demanding that you join in its cheerfulness. It's the color of school buses, hazard tape, advertisements, and fluorescent overhead lights that bleed into your retinas. To me, it felt like artificial happiness, manufactured warmth. I never saw a good use of yellow until I listened to Japanese Breakfast. A name that conjures the softer yellows involved in the first meal of the day: egg yolks, butter on toast, ripened bananas, and an early wash of sunlight in the morning. The yellow I despised was artificial: oversaturated, synthetic, and performative. But natural yellow is something else entirely, living in daffodils and late afternoon light. Watching the world at golden hour, awash in amber, feels the same as listening to Japanese Breakfast: warm, comforting, and introspective.

Japanese Breakfast formed in Philadelphia as an outlet for singer, guitarist, and songwriter Michelle Zauner. What started off as lo-fi bedroom recordings grew into an indie pop project that would eventually earn Grammy nominations for Best New Artist and Best Alternative Music Album. But at its core, the band has always been tinted in shades of yellow and blue, and rooted in the fragility of loss.

In 2014, as Zauner was writing and composing what would become the band's debut, *Psychopomp*, her mother was battling cancer. She passed away two years before the album's release. The record serves as homage not only through its lyricism but also through its cover: an old photograph of her mother with a friend. The color palette is dominated by cool blues. Yellow is almost entirely absent, though hints of the color slip in through the women's carefree faces. Perhaps yellow exists only as the artificial version in the forced optimism that Zauner describes wearing in front of family. In an interview with *The Independent*, she relates the album as "a conversation with myself." She says that, "I thought no one would understand me, so I expressed myself in a way that I was familiar with, and I communicated with a whole bunch of people." In channeling her grief, Zauner found a community of fans that would only grow with their next album.

Soft Sounds from Another Planet was my introduction to Japanese Breakfast, with their indie hit "Road Head." The music sounds otherworldly and expands sonically, layering synths and distortion beneath Zauner's distinctive voice. "Diving Woman" stretches into a long, reverb-soaked outro of overlaid guitars, while "Machinist" pulses with electronic experimentation in a story about a human falling in love with a robot. Lyrically, Zauner does not shy away from the grief of losing her mother. Still, she hints at escapism, alluding to her eventual recovery. The album art reflects that shift: Zauner stands wistfully in a golden haze, her silhouette doubled in reflective light. For the first time, yellow moves to the foreground in a cosmic, sun-drenched glow. Here, her grief is still present, but it is no longer suffocating. It provides a glimpse of the transition to come, one from grief to acceptance.

That evolution fully blooms on their third album, *Jubilee*. From the exultant horns that open "Paprika," the album pivots away from the melancholy of the band's earlier work and plunges headfirst into joy. The cover places a cheeky Zauner among hanging hoshigaki, a sweet orange-yellow dried fruit. At first glance, it seemed that Japanese Breakfast had fallen deep into a canary yellow paint can. The next song, "Be Sweet," with its catchy indie pop beat and *X-Files* inspired music video, could easily be mistaken for pure, artificial brightness. But *Jubilee* is more layered than it first appears. "Kokomo, IN" offers a wistful memory of young love, far superior than the Beach Boys song it was inspired by. Later down the track list, we reach "Posing in Bondage," which contains my favorite of Zauner's lyrics about grief: "When the world divides into two people, those who have lost and those who have yet to." Despite the initial yellow sheen, the songs like "In Hell" and "Tactics" reveal the underlying complexities of the color. Beneath the bright lacquer of joy lies an acknowledgement that grief does not disappear; it just settles into the body. Here, yellow is happiness chosen with knowledge of what came before.

Their most recent album, *For Melancholy Brunettes (& sad women)*, shifts the palette again, softening the brightness. Orchestral swells form a backdrop for mythological stories of love and loss in "Here is Someone," "Orlando in Love," and "Leda," culminating in a very romantic album. Slide and steel guitar add a sepia wash, tinting the somber lyrics with a muted yellow glow. On "Picture Window," Zauner returns to the anxiety of loving someone while harboring fears about their mortality. The lyrics sketch the quiet terror of anticipating loss before it arrives. These yellows are filtered through memory and apprehension, producing warmth without erasing sadness. This is evident in the cover art that depicts Zauner amidst gothic objects rife with symbolism—flowers, grapes, bread, and even a skull—display themes of love and longing. Despite the album's title, its sound and imagery create a golden warmth. Zauner has moved past the sharp edges of her grief and has allowed herself to wander into myth, story, and other worlds. Through this, she circles back to the cosmic escapism of *Soft Sounds*, this time with more resolve.

Across these albums, Japanese Breakfast traces an arc that mirrors grief: depression, numbness, acceptance, and the complicated afterlife of loss. The colors shift accordingly, from icy blues to radiant golds. In their music, yellow is ever-morphing and elastic. It can be exuberant ("Everybody Wants to Love You"), nostalgic ("Kokomo, IN"), anxious ("Picture Window"), or tender ("Posing for Cars"). The brighter shades demand attention first, but in listening to the albums in full, the subtler yellows emerge. That is what I misunderstood about the color. Artificial yellows shout, flattening everything beneath their glare. Natural yellows glow, holding both light and shadow, joy and the memory of sorrow. Japanese Breakfast's music reveals that duality. Real joy, like real yellow, is not blinding, but luminous because it recognizes the darkness that made it visible.

I don't hate yellow the way I used to, and certainly not the yellow that Japanese Breakfast taught me to see.

WRITTEN AND DESIGNED BY JULIANNA PIJAR

PSYCHOPOMP (2016)

SOFT SOUNDS FROM ANOTHER PLANET (2017)

JUBILEE (2021)

FOR MELANCHOLY BRUNETTES (& SAD WOMEN) (2025)

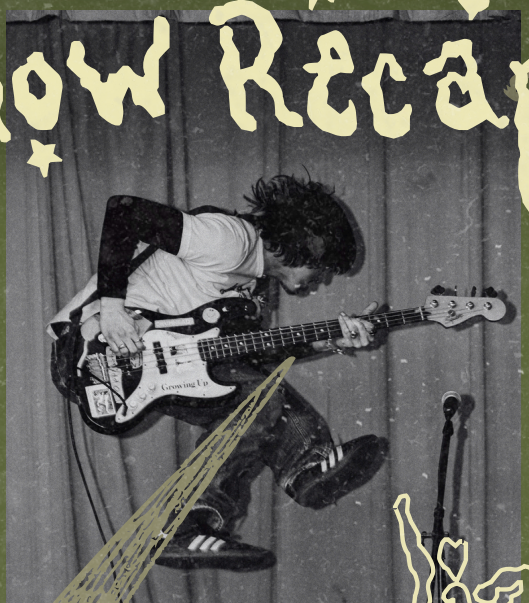
Shot by: Henry Klein, Olivia Dans, Mae Posey, and Betsey Johnson

public health

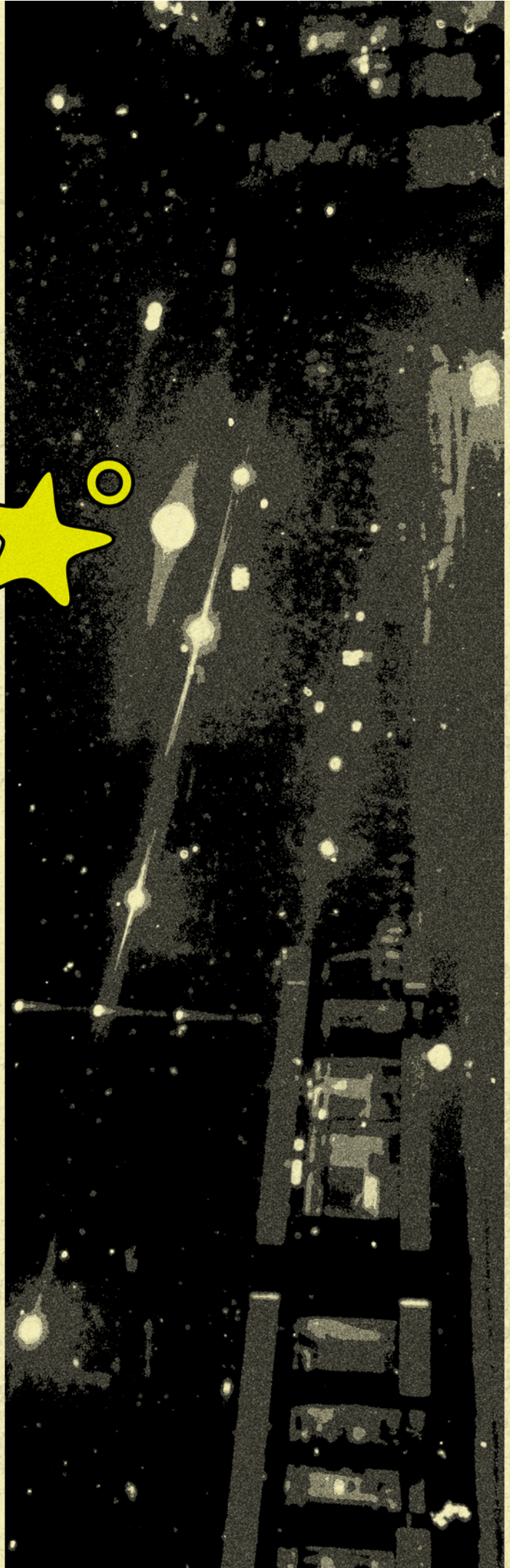
manifest

DEMO: RED

Show Recap



On February 6, 2026 Demo Magazine hosted our launch party for Saturation Vol. 2: Red at the Polish Combatants' Hall.



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